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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

The Larger Socialism. By BERTRAM BENEDICT. New York: Macmillan, 1921. Pp. 243.

This is an extraordinarily clear and candid book. The author is a member of the Socialist Party but he possesses the rare ability to treat as hypotheses what most Socialist Party members worship as dogmas, and to test them in the light of reality. The result is perhaps the most thought-provoking work on socialism that has yet been written in America.

Two closely related themes run through the book. The first is a tempered emphasis upon socialism as both more efficient and more Christian than our present economic order, while the second is a searching criticism of the inadequacy of the theory and tactics of the American Socialist movement. The arguments advanced in favor of the first are largely the ones already familiar to students. Mr. Benedict does well to insist that "the cardinal point of efficiency in Socialist production . . . is the regularization of industry—regularization of kind of output, of amount of output, and of method of output." While freely conceding that capitalism can achieve some degree of regularization, he points out that "capitalism cannot compel its producers to move from the field of luxuries to the field of necessities if there be greater profit in luxuries than in necessities; nor can it drive its producers to enter fields, however essential to the public welfare, where there is no profit; nor can it impose upon its producers a ban on profitable over-production or a demand for an unprofitable increase of production in periods of under-production." Mr. Benedict's arguments that a socialistic state, based on production for public need, not on profits, would obviate these defects are cogent up to a certain point, but in the opinion of the reviewer, he assumes in part the presence of extremely intelligent administrators who, in a real and not a paper society, might well turn out to be stupid bureaucrats. The intellectual honesty of Mr. Benedict is shown in his cautionary statement that a socialistic commonwealth, if it is to maintain production, cannot decrease for some years, save in a few industries, the hours of labor below seven a day. He believes that later on the enhanced production due to more efficient workers will make possible an increase in the social surplus of goods as well as a great development of added leisure.

It is, however, the second motif of the book, namely the criticism of the theory and tactics of American Socialism, which will most interest the reader. Few have pointed out more clearly the inadequacies of the dogmas of the class struggle, the economic interpretation of history, and the formal theory of surplus value, than Mr. Benedict. He shows incontrovertibly how the socialist analysis has erred in its exclusive interpretation of history from an economic viewpoint, and clearly demonstrates how men, urged by instincts or swayed by passion, so frequently act in direct opposition to their economic interest. Thus the economic interpretation of history may explain how the war started, but it cannot explain how the masses in all the warring countries threw themselves into the struggle and resolved to see it through. Mr. Benedict shows himself no mere ideologue when he ascribes most of the intellectual sterility of American Socialism, as well as its fierce intolerance, to its unreserved acceptance of Marxian dogma and to its refusal to form a creative philosophy based upon the realities of American economic and cultural life.

Much as Mr. Benedict criticizes the Socialist Party, his criticism of liberals and modern liberalism is even more pungent and emphatic. He is not only a member of the party but he proposes to remain one. He wants to bore from within and lead the party to place more importance on the ethical appeal, on the development of great leaders, on the value of administrative ability, and on a remedy for the possible excess of population which might result through increased family income. For not only should there be a revision of tactics, according to the author, but there should also be a broadening of aim. The larger socialism is, in his mind, not merely the public ownership of the socially necessary means of production and distribution, but the promotion of social welfare in all its manifold forms. Its aim must be to harmonize individual and social well-being and to foster the development of a society of free spirits. All this is in welcome contrast to the Bolshevik type of mind which rarely cares for freedom but, certain that its doctrines form absolute truth, wishes to bind the youth with a new set of dogma.

Were the Socialist Party to contain many men of the clearness of vision and sympathetic understanding of Mr. Benedict, it might become a formidable factor in American political and economic life. If it fails to take to heart such candid and sweet-tempered advice it will have given one more evidence of its present incapacity to cope with the real problems of American life.

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